

have a blood test to be screened for ovarian cancer. It is called CEA-125. Any cancer specialist would tell you that that screening test for ovarian cancer is absolutely worthless. A better mandate would have been to say that anybody over age 30, any woman, could have an ultrasound done every 6 months to look at the ovaries, but that would be astronomically expensive. Another mandate in the State of Georgia says that every baby born in a hospital in the State of Georgia has to be screened for sickle cell anemia, even when they are a part of an ethnic group where the percentage of sickle cell anemia is zero. Nada. These mandates just go and on, and you have got them in all 50 States.

Clearly, we need to do something about that because they are driving up the cost of health care. We need to give people the opportunity to join their other employees in trade associations.

This is a good bill. It will reduce the rolls of the uninsured by 8 million people. I commend it to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle. I urge you to support this rule and pass the Sam Johnson legislation. It is a good bill. It will get people the protection they need and provide health care for so many who do not have it.

Ms. MATSUI. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Earlier this month, the Los Angeles Times ran a story that I think cuts to the heart of this discussion. It is the story of a husband and wife living in Southern California. After successfully battling bone cancer 7 years earlier, Doug did what so many Americans would like to do. He started a small business making boat parts. Soon, he was approached by an AHP offering a \$400-a-month health insurance policy which even included special cancer coverage.

Tragically, a few months after he purchased the policy, his cancer returned and it became quite clear that the quality of that association plan was not what Doug or his wife, Dana, expected. It turned out that this particular plan covered less than 18 percent of Doug's \$550,000 treatment cost. Doug and Dana rapidly found themselves buried under hundreds of thousands of dollars in bills. And as his wife recounted to the Los Angeles Times, at several points before the cancer ultimately claimed his life, Doug begged her to divorce him so that she would not be responsible for his debt.

I cannot believe this is the solution we are offering to small business owners like Doug and Dana. The American people deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, this bill offers no health care solutions for small business owners. It raises premiums on 80 percent of small businesses; will increase the number of uninsured by 1 million people; and reduce coverage for another 7 million individuals who are most in need of care. My friends on the other side might find these facts inconvenient, but that does not make them less

true. And it will accomplish all of this by loosening or removing consumer protections and by walking away from State mandates that guarantee treatment for diabetes and screenings for breast cancer.

We can do much, much better than this for America, Mr. Speaker. I urge Members to oppose the rule, oppose the underlying bill, and support the Kind-Andrews substitute.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BISHOP of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I appreciate those who have spoken on the bill today. I appreciate the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY), a member of the medical profession, who so eloquently talked about some of the realities of this particular bill and what we are looking at. And I appreciate the gentlewoman from California and her wonderful and kind way in which she handled the rule on the minority side.

Just as a means of criteria of what we are going through as far as the rule itself, every amendment that was proposed for this particular rule was discussed thoroughly and voted upon in the committee, with the exception of obviously the motion to recommit. With the debate we have had in previous years, every element of this bill has been thoroughly debated both on the floor and in committee, this year as well as in years past.

I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, my favorite Senator, even though I am not supposed to have one, is the junior Senator from Kentucky who is the only one to have won 100 games in both the American and the National League. Because of that, I have his baseball cards. I hope he does very well over there because if they continue to rise in value, that may be the only way I pay for my health care in the future.

I was reading on the airplane coming back yesterday of a story of Senator BUNNING when he was a pitcher for the Detroit Tigers and he was facing the Yankees. The Yankees sent out Bob Turley to be the first base coach because he was great at picking off signals. Sure enough, he knew what the signals were. His signal would be every time a fastball was coming, he would whistle at the batter. Hank Bauer is the first batter up there. Fastball, he whistled, Bauer hit a screamer into left field. The second batter is Tony Kubek. Fastball, whistle, he hit what would have been extra bases into right field except the second baseman caught the ball in self-defense.

The third hitter up is Mickey Mantle. By this time the pitcher is upset with what is going on and takes a couple of steps to Turley and says, "Next time you whistle, I'm going to drill the batter." He takes a couple of steps to the batter and tells him the same thing. Sure enough, a fastball, the whistle, Mantle does not swing. The next pitch is a slider which hits Mantle right in the legs. He is upset, takes a couple of

steps towards the mound, but the catcher and the umpire direct him to first base.

The next batter up is Yogi Berra. Once again, fastball, the whistle comes, Yogi does not take it, but then remembering what happened, he steps out of the batter's box, cups his hands and yells back at Senator BUNNING who is the pitcher at this time and says, "He may be whistling, but I ain't listening."

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of people who have been whistling at us on this particular issue. Every time I go to a town hall meeting, I face people who want some kind of relief in the ability of getting insurance. I get letters from them all the time. When small businesspeople come to my office, they are talking repeatedly about this particular issue. They are all whistling, asking for some kind of relief.

I realize I talked about my three sons who did not have insurance. My two that still do not will not have it under this bill because the provisions do not allow them to participate. But my next-door neighbor who is trying to make a living in a shop down on Main Street that does not have insurance could under the provisions of this bill. Those are real-life people who need this kind of assistance and help, and they cannot get it any other way. The status quo does not offer this kind of assistance. This is one of those few rays of hope that they will have. These people are truly whistling at us. Our job as Congress is to finally listen.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support of the rule on the underlying bill, H.R. 525.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1445

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 22, POSTAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 380 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

H. RES. 380

Resolved, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 22) to reform the postal laws of the United States. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Government Reform. After general debate the bill shall be considered for amendment under the five-

minute rule. It shall be in order to consider as an original bill for the purpose of amendment under the five-minute rule the amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Government Reform now printed in the bill. The committee amendment in the nature of a substitute shall be considered as read. All points of order against the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute are waived. Notwithstanding clause 11 of rule XVIII, no amendment to the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute shall be in order except those printed in the report of the Committee on Rules accompanying this resolution. Each such amendment may be offered only in the order printed in the report, may be offered only by a Member designated in the report, shall be considered as read, shall be debatable for the time specified in the report equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole. All points of order against such amendments are waived. At the conclusion of consideration of the bill for amendment the Committee shall rise and report the bill to the House with such amendments as may have been adopted. Any Member may demand a separate vote in the House on any amendment adopted in the Committee of the Whole to the bill or to the committee amendment in the nature of a substitute. The previous question shall be considered as ordered on the bill and amendments thereto to final passage without intervening motion except one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FORBES). The gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

This structured rule provides 1 hour of general debate, equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Government Reform, and waives all points of order against consideration of the bill. It provides that the amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Government Reform now printed in the bill shall be considered as an original bill for the purpose of amendment and waives all points of order against the amendment in the nature of a substitute recommended by the Committee on Government Reform.

The rule makes in order only those amendments printed in the Committee on Rules report accompanying the resolution and provides that these amendments may be offered only in the order printed in the report, only by a Member designated in the report, and shall be considered as read. They shall be debatable for the time specified in the report equally divided and controlled by the proponent and an opponent, shall not be subject to amendment, and shall not be subject to a demand for division of the question in the House or in the Committee of the Whole.

Finally, the rule waives all points of order against the amendments printed in the report and provides one motion to recommit with or without instructions.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 22, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, and this underlying rule. When I was first elected to Congress in 1996, I served on the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight's Postal Service Subcommittee, which was charged with the task of reforming our Nation's postal operations to make them more efficient, cost-effective, and responsive. And although I no longer serve on the committee or the subcommittee charged with the oversight of the U.S. Postal Service, my commitment to reforming the Postal Service has not decreased.

Today, for the first time in three decades, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), chairman of Committee on Government Reform; and the gentleman from New York (Mr. McHUGH), my friend, have brought to the House floor a comprehensive bill that would vastly improve the United States Postal Service, and I would like to thank both of them for all the hard work that the Committee on Government Reform has invested in this legislation.

Since President Nixon signed the Postal Reorganization Act in 1970, the United States Postal Service has not significantly updated its fundamental operations. While this legislation helped to update the Postal Service and to move it from a bureaucracy subsidized by tax revenue to self-sufficiency, a market-based entity, the way that people communicate has changed dramatically over the last three decades, and the Postal Service must now evolve to meet the changing demands of consumers.

The Postal Service is a very large organization that sits at the center of a \$900 billion industry, representing about 9 percent of America's GDP, that employs more than 9 million workers nationwide. It processes more than 200 billion pieces of mail to 130 million households and businesses every year, and it directly employs 700,000 people, making it the second largest employer in the country. If the Postal Service were a private company, it would rank 11th on the Fortune 500 in terms of revenue.

However, 21st century realities, including decreasing volume; insufficient revenue; mounting debts; and the rapid growth of electronic communications for advertising, bill payments, and information transfer present an enormous challenge to the Postal Service in fulfilling its mission to "provide postal services that bind the Nation together through the correspondence of the people, to provide access in all communities, and to offer prompt, reliable postal services at uniform prices."

H.R. 22 maps out a responsible and accountable future for the United States Postal Service that will provide

increased oversight for its operations, renew its focus on its core mission of delivering the mail, and save as many as 1.5 million jobs in the private sector that rely on the Postal, and accomplishing all of this without imposing a significant new tax burden on every American who uses stamps.

This bill would transform today's Postal Rate Commission into the Postal Regulatory Commission and give it to the authority to ensure that the Postal Service as an efficient and responsible operation in the 21st Century environment exists. It would require the Postal Service to account for all of its costs in SCC-like financial disclosure statements and give the Regulatory Commission the authority to punish the Postal Service for any non-compliance. It would also subject the Postal Service to antitrust laws, require the Regulatory Commission to account for the advantages that its government status confers, and build these advantages into a competitive product that helps to raise the level playing field with private business.

H.R. 22 would renew the Postal Service's focus on its core mission also of collecting, sorting, transporting, and delivering the mail more efficiently, and to bar it from new nonpostal products and services already being provided efficiently by the private sector. It would also prevent a 2-cent postage rate increase this year with another even larger increase that might have been anticipated next year that would act as a significant drain and backdoor tax on our growing economy.

According to estimates, if mail decreased by 10 percent, over 780,000 mailing industry jobs would also be at risk; and if decreased by 20 percent, over 1.5 million jobs would also be at risk.

As our economy continues to expand with 25 consecutive months of job gains adding over 3.7 million new jobs to payrolls, and payroll employment having increased by 2.1 over the year, we should not be adding artificial impediments to future job growth and expansion like a stamp price increase. Adding this new stealth tax on American families and businesses would simply accelerate the movement of mailers to other communications media, decreasing volumes at the Postal Service even further and exposing taxpayers to the unfunded obligations of the United States Postal Service.

I am very proud of the hard work that so many Members have put into reforming the United States Postal Service to ensure that it is a dynamic, market-based entity that provides uniform and universal service to America while preventing its status as a government entity from subsidizing its competition for providing goods and services already being supplied by the private sector.

I would personally like to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. McHUGH) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), our wonderful chairman, for their tireless efforts to

improve the United States Postal Office.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS) for yielding me the customary 30 minutes, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today with disappointment that the House is again considering a rule that blocks all but a select few from offering amendments. Let me make it clear I do not oppose the underlying bill, and I intend to vote for it, but the closed manner by which the majority is bringing the underlying bill to the floor is just plain wrong.

Yesterday in the Committee on Rules, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. FORD) offered an amendment that would permit military personnel on Active Duty in the Department of Defense-designated combat zones to receive packages on a postage-free basis. Under this rule, however, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. FORD) is not permitted to offer his amendment. I am disappointed and displeased that the majority has once again failed to provide the House with an opportunity to extend the most meager of benefits to those men and women who risk their lives so that all of us can be free. We really should be ashamed of ourselves.

As the gentleman from Texas has noted, Mr. Speaker, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act represents the first major restructuring of the United States Postal Service in over 30 years. This bill provides the Postal Service with greater flexibility to set its rates and manage its costs. It also creates a new regulatory system for overseeing the Postal Service's operations and levels the playing field for the Postal Service to finally compete against the megacommercial delivery services of the world.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is long overdue. On July 26, 1775, Benjamin Franklin was named our country's first Postmaster General. It took the Continental Congress just 1 day to name Benjamin Franklin to that prestigious post. As many of my colleagues and students of American history are well aware, the Congress of 1775 had many great issues to deal with at that particular time, such as the Revolutionary War, disputes over taxes, and the issue of private landownership, just to name a few. Yet with all the great events that were taking place at the time, the Continental Congress still managed to name a Postmaster General in just 1 day. Ironically, it took President Bush 5 years to finally support the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act.

□ 1500

Benjamin Franklin once said: "You may delay, but time will not."

Mr. Speaker, I applaud my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for refusing to delay this bill any further and for

demonstrating the intuition to present such a sensible and necessary piece of legislation. The success of the legislative process by which the underlying bill comes to the floor today should serve as an example of what Congress can accomplish when bipartisanship and openness overwhelm political partisanship.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the underlying legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS) has made some very good points, and that is that the work that has gone into this bill, while it has been some probably 10 years in the making, was done through strong leadership, it was done through strong bipartisan leadership, it was done not only with the negotiation of the United States Postal Service, its management and its unions, but also so many outside groups that had an influence in impacting a bill that was done properly.

A lot of that credit goes to the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform, who a long time ago decided that it was in the best interest of the economy of this country to make sure that a carefully crafted bill, a bipartisan bill that could be supported on this floor by members like the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), who had served on the postal committee many years ago with me, would be able to bring forth to this floor a good answer. I am very proud to support this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS).

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, an alumnus of the Committee on Government Reform, a very active former committee member, for yielding me this time.

I rise today in support of House Resolution 380, the rule to provide for the consideration of the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act.

"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." This is the unofficial motto of the Postal Service, engraved outside the James A. Farley Post Office in New York City.

But today, the Postal Service faces a threat far greater than snow or rain or heat or gloom of night. The threat is the outdated and unsustainable structural framework within which the Postal Service operates. It threatens to bring it to the brink of catastrophe unless Congress acts immediately. I think that H.R. 22, the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act, is the solution.

This legislation reforms and sustains a vital sector of our overall economy. Standing alone, the Postal Service currently has more than 800,000 employees. But more than 9 million American

jobs, \$900 billion in commerce, and nearly 9 percent of the Nation's gross domestic product depend on mail and package delivery.

Each year the Postal Service processes and delivers 208 billion pieces of mail to more than 130 million addresses in the United States. That is 208 billion magazines, catalogs, thank-you notes, birthday cards, wedding invitations, Social Security checks, IRS refunds, letters to our Congressmen, movie rentals, all delivered in fulfillment of the Postal Service's promise of universal service.

The last time that the Congress passed legislation to overhaul the Postal Service was 1970 when President Nixon signed the Postal Reorganization Act, before e-mails, before faxes. The world has changed.

It is now time to bring the Postal Service into the 21st century, to rescue it from the structural, legal, and financial constraints that have brought it to the brink of utter breakdown.

Now, our time to act is short. This past April, the Postal Service began the process of requesting a 5.4 percent rate hike for all categories of mail. These rate hikes, think of them as a tax on the average postal customer which, of course, is practically everybody in the United States, will take effect next year unless Congress acts. For direct marketers, financial service companies, businesses relying heavily on shipping and mailing, these rate hikes will be devastating.

Some observers have likened the Postal Service's current situation to a death spiral, where declining business leads to higher rates which, in turn, leads to further declines in business until it is too late to change course. Unfortunately, under current law, the Postal Service's only recourse to remain competitive in today's markets is to raise its rates.

Moreover, the Postal Service's more recent request for a rate increase was spurred in part by an existing requirement that the Postal Service contribute \$3.1 billion to a Federal pension escrow account, even though this account now houses more than \$73 billion in civil service retirement savings that rightfully belongs to the USPS. This is but one of the outdated requirements that H.R. 22 seeks to reform.

Is this bill perfect? No, but there is no magic legislative potion that will cure the Postal Service of its ills. But I think that all of the stakeholders, the postal employees, the financial service companies, major marketers and, most importantly, all Americans who use stamps, are better off with this legislation than they would be without this long overdue package of reform.

More than 35 years after the last reform of the Postal Service, with millions of jobs at stake, and particularly in the face of the pending rate increases, the time has come for Congress to act. I want to thank the gentleman from California (Chairman DREIER) and the Committee on Rules

for crafting this rule. I urge Members to support it. I thank my good friend, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS), a former member of the committee, for his leadership and assistance in crafting this rule and getting this bill to the House floor. It was very, very important; and without his efforts, we probably would not be here today.

Ben Franklin once said: "A penny saved is a penny earned." Rates are set to go up 2 cents. If we act today, we can stave that off, we can delay that, we can put savings back into the post office.

I want to also thank my colleague, the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), who has forgotten more about the Postal Service than I will ever know, who struggled with this for 10 years and has been very critical in crafting this legislation; and on the other side of the aisle, my ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) who have put innumerable hours into crafting the bipartisan bill.

I think this is a good rule, it is a good bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to yield 4 minutes to my friend, the distinguished gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy in permitting me to speak on this rule. I rise in support of the approach that has been taken. I add my praise for the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. TOM DAVIS), for the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), for the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS), for the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), for people who have labored long and hard dealing with the first post office update in over a third of a century. What we have before us is a carefully balanced effort to update and modernize this critical service.

I became involved with this effort when I first came to Congress 10 years ago, dealing with one specific element of focus, and that is to make sure that the post office, the local post office, which is the cornerstone of a livable community in small neighborhoods, in small-town America, in downtowns, that those 38,000 postal facilities in every way were assets to the community.

Sadly, what we found was a litany of efforts in the past where the post office basically did not play by the rules. It was idiosyncratic. Local land-use decisions were turned into political footballs. We had a series of efforts where the post office unfortunately ignored environmental regulations, local needs and desires. We set about to fix that with legislation that basically would have required the post office to play by the same rules as the rest of America.

I will say over the course of the 10 years, working with some of the col-

leagues that I mentioned, working with the Board of Governors of the Postal Service, working with three Postmasters General and others who are active in this effort, that we have come a long way. In fact, in many areas of the United States, we have seen examples where the post office has taken seriously its responsibilities and has been a model player providing that essential cornerstone.

It is important that this not be idiosyncratic. It is important that this approach, this way of doing business, must be codified into law so everybody can be protected. One of the reasons I support H.R. 22 is because it does just that. It requires the post office to obey zoning, planning, environmental regulations. It will be better for the post office; it is better for our communities.

But I want to go a little beyond that, because as I have been involved, I have been struck with the importance, not just in bringing up the physical facilities of 38,000 postal offices around the country, but to be active in terms of the change that is taking place.

The United States Postal Service occasionally comes into criticism by people who are concerned about it, but the fact is the post office handles one-half of the mail in the entire world. They collect only one-quarter of the revenue; they have less than a fifth of the work force; they are more than three times as productive as postal services around the world, and their rates are lower than any other of the developed countries. It is also important that we are ready for the changes that are cascading down upon the Postal Service. The status quo is not tenable. This legislation recognizes that.

I strongly urge, however, that as we come forward with a range of amendments that they be rejected. I appreciate that they are well-intended. Some of them in other contexts I may be interested in, but this is part of this carefully crafted balance. It is important that we not upset the apple cart. It does not take much to derail it. It has been a hard pull to get to this point. I strongly urge that we support making the post office a full partner, that we resist amendments that would upset the balance, and that we can all be, after the approval of H.R. 22, the modernization, so that we can be about the business that is going to have to go on from here. Because there is more work that is going to be done. Controversy is not going to go away. Luckily, this legislation provides a platform that is going to help us all do this important work.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

A lot of the leadership that has been talked about, making sure that this bill is a carefully crafted bill, is true. But there are also a lot of people who played a big role in making sure that the elements and the people who are a part of the dialogue and a part of the things that were necessary to make sure this balanced bill was brought forward were important also.

Mr. Speaker, the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs for the Committee on Government Reform, has played an integral role in making sure that not only her footprint was on this and hand print was on this but, also, in particular, that other people who had a vested interest, most of all the taxpayers of this country, were also involved.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Mrs. MILLER).

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this rule, and I am very proud to be a cosponsor of this legislation. I did serve on the postal panel and the Committee on Government Reform as well. This is really the first real reform of the United States Postal Service since the 1970s.

Mr. Speaker, America succeeds and America prospers because America evolves. Our Nation evolves. We are always striving to leverage our economic, our technological, and our political advancements to improve our entire Nation. Much of what might have been good in the 1970s is clearly not good enough for the 21st century, especially when it comes to communications; and the United States Postal Service, with a uniquely critical means of communicating in our Nation, unfortunately, is laboring under a business model that was built in an era that predates the Internet, that predates e-mail, and even fax machines.

Any private sector business would have been put out of business. But the United States Postal Service today, and these are some staggering numbers, actually delivers 200 billion pieces of mail each and every year, it delivers to 130 million households, and it is the center of a nearly \$1 trillion industry.

But the competition is growing, of course. Revenues are at risk; its workforce, unfortunately, is aging, and so is its equipment. Yet these are all the same kinds of challenges that so many businesses today face.

I was very proud to cosponsor and to update and to upgrade this legislation, which does all of that, for our Postal Service. The Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act modernizes the Postal Service's infrastructure and its financial framework; and at the same time, it also maintains its traditional benefit, the best benefit I think, and that, of course, is 6-day, universal service.

□ 1515

H.R. 22 provides the postal office with firmer financial ground, and it mitigates the needs to constantly raise postal rates. It ensures those that live in America's rural communities that they still have very close access to a full-service postal center. What is more, equally as important, I think, is it preserves the right for collective bargaining for our postal workers.

Our postal employees have a record of achievement of on-time delivery performance, and many of us, I think, were reminded of how much we take them for granted after the anthrax scare. In fact, I remember it was a commercial that was playing that was put out by the Postal Service that had that Carly Simon song in the background, Let the River Run, and it really, I think, was a very powerful ad that reminded us all of how important our postal employees are.

The men and women of the United States Postal Service stood then and they stand now in harm's way sometimes, because they have dedicated themselves to serving all of us. They certainly deserve the right to bargain collectively to protect the financial future of their families.

This bill also serves as the framework that will help the United States Postal Service to become a model, quite frankly, as a governmental agency to be both cost-effective and cost-efficient, to help them to create a business plan, to negotiate the best business practices with its customers, and it allows for them to focus on a term, customer service, that is not exclusively a concept that is exclusively in the private domain, it can also be in the public domain as well.

This bill embraces concepts like work sharing, in which the Postal Service embarks in a partnership with private companies offering postage discounts to businesses who help the Postal Service prepare and move our mail, flexibility that the private sector enjoys and that they employee as part of its competitive business mix.

This bill essentially allows the United States Postal Service to operate like a business, which will clearly benefit all Americans. So I do want to thank everybody who worked so very hard on this piece of legislation. It is a very important piece of legislation. I want to personally recognize the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman DAVIS), who just made some remarks earlier. I have watched him work tirelessly on this bill, as well as the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), who has been a leader in postal reform for a very long time.

Mr. Speaker, I think this is a great piece of legislation which also demonstrates very clearly how bipartisan work can work very well on the floor of this House. It certainly has done that. I commend all of the Democratic Members who have worked very hard on this as well, and I would urge my colleagues to support this rule and urge them to support this critical piece of legislation as well.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS), my good friend. A lot has been made of those who crafted this legislation. The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) was extremely instrumental in providing that bipartisan flavor to bring us to this moment.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS) for yielding me this time. I also want to thank him and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS) for the presentation of this rule.

I want to commend the chairman of the Committee on Government Reform, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS), and the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), for the tremendous leadership that they have displayed in shaping this bipartisan legislation.

I also want to commend the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), who is known as "Postal Reform" in our committee, because he has worked on this issue for such a long period of time.

Many of us recognize that postal issues are not considered to be the most exotic business that will come before this House, but if you are waiting for an important document that does not come at the time you were hoping to receive it, or maybe it was a letter from a relative, from your mother or your father or from your child, and it is not there, or it was an admissions letter to college or university and you are anticipating its arrival, and it does not come, then you begin to realize how important the Postal Service is.

I want to commend the thousands of men and women who work every day to make sure that these channels of communication are still open. Imagine being able to get a letter from anywhere, first class, in the United States of America for 37 cents. That is no easy feat.

And so I commend all of those who have made sure that these channels of communication have been kept open. I commend all of those members of the committee who have labored, and all of the stakeholders. Shaping this legislation was not the easiest thing in the world to do, but I have been told that when men and women of goodwill come together with a basic recognition of the need to be in sync, that you can work out solutions to any problems that have existed.

That is what has taken place in the Committee on Government Reform. Again, I commend the tremendous leadership that we have gotten from the chairman and ranking member. I know that there are amendments that are desirable, but I am going to resist them, and urge that they be resisted, and urge passage of this landmark legislation that seeks to reform the postal system and postal operations.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BOEHNER).

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, let me thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SESSIONS) for yielding me time.

Let me stand today and thank those who have put together this postal reform bill. It is not an issue that I work on. I deal with Education and Workforce issues. But I have watched this issue over the last 10 years be hit from

one side of the ballpark to the other, kicked from one end of the field to the other, and yet we never could quite get it over the line.

Mr. Speaker, I really want to stand today and thank the gentleman (Chairman DAVIS), the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), the other members of the committee who were involved in this, for bringing together all of these different moving pieces in order to create a successful legislative package.

The real reason I rise is to thank our colleague and my friend, the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), for over 10 years has put in time, effort, blood, tears, to try to hold these pieces together, bring the necessary agreements to bring other parties together, and I think that he has done a fabulous job and deserves a lot of recognition from all of the Members for bringing this package along, staying with it. He could have walked away countless times because it was too hard, it was too difficult, and too many people just never wanted to come to the table, but because of his efforts and the efforts of many others, we are here today with a bipartisan package that deserves the support of all of our colleagues.

I support the bill and certainly support the rule that will bring it to the floor.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON).

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me time and for his work in bringing this bill and this rule to the floor.

The reason that my colleagues are hearing such kudos for the chairman, the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. DAVIS), subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) will be understood, I think, if you understand that it has taken us 11 years to get here. So only great tenacity and skill could have brought us this far.

I have been in Congress for 15 years. It seems to me that this has been before us forever, but never on the floor before, and there is a good reason for it. It is not because there were special interests or cantankerous Members; it is we are trying to do almost the impossible. We are trying to make an agency meant to be only partially competitive stand alongside one of the most competitive parts of our economy.

So what was necessary was to somehow bring the likes of UPS and FedEx on board at the same time that all of the unions could be brought with us, UPS and the entire industry. That is why it has taken so long and why in reverence we have to be thankful for those who have accomplished this mission. Understand we are dealing with

an industry that is 9 percent of our GDP, nothing to be taken lightly.

Yet what you have before you is something of a miracle. It is a unanimous and bipartisan bill where Members have put aside their selfish concerns, and we do have them, for the greater good of the Postal Service, because one thing we have to come to grips with is not a single Member that can go home and say, well, it was not good enough for me, so I put your Postal Service in jeopardy. Just try that out on your constituents.

At the same time, the Postal Service had to wake up to the 21st century, had to modernize in ways that 9/11 had nothing to do with, had to modernize because the world has come forward with technology that challenges them, the way UPS and FedEx will never challenge them. How do you do that?

They are still trying to do that. But one of the things you do is give the Postal Service some of the flexibility that is associated with the private sector, as much of it as you can, consistent with the fact that this is a controlled section of the economy, because there are some things that the Postal Service must do and nobody else can do; that is, go to some of the far reaches of your rural districts where they better get their mail on time the way I do mine nine blocks from the Capitol.

Even those who had serious problems with this bill, the mail handlers, for example, have a real problem and one that has to be taken seriously with the way in which the bill deals with single pieces of parcels, single parcels, where we have allowed the Postal Service to transfer revenue in order to keep this part of the service lower, and we are getting rid of that to make them more competitive with the private sector.

They say, watch out because you are going to raise the costs, and that is not good. But you know what they have said and agreed to? Perhaps we can resolve it in conference. So they say, pass the bill. I say as well, because we need to modernize the Postal Service. And we have even gotten around for ourselves the part that says that we might contribute to the deficit by giving back to the Treasury what they put on to the Postal Service, which is the cost of military pensions.

We say you have held billions of dollars from the Postal Service. Tell you one thing, if we did not do that, what it means is that the Postal Service, which has already filed for a rate increase, would be forced to go ahead. I, for one, do not want to go home in 2006 and say, I voted for a mail increase. That is what you will vote for if you vote against this bill.

My thanks to the sponsors once again for this historic work.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, as you know, this bill is about the taxpayer. It is also about high-tech areas that depend upon a Postal Service that works properly. And our next speaker is from one of those areas, a high-tech area

that is important to this country in not only manufacturing, but also delivery of goods and products.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO).

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of this rule and underlying postal reform legislation. I commend the gentleman from Virginia (Chairman DAVIS) and the ranking member, the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN), along with the much heralded sponsor of this bill, the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), for working in a bipartisan manner that has twice allowed this bill to be reported from committee by a unanimous vote.

Now, I have only been here 5 years, and like my colleague from Washington, DC, says, she feels like every year it is painstakingly making its way through the process. And even in the 5 years since I have been here, I know how important this bill is, and I am so pleased that we are at the point we are today.

I am pleased to be a cosponsor of H.R. 22 because of its importance to businesses, postal employees, and all of us who have mail delivered to our homes or our businesses. This legislation has provisions that will allow the Postal Service to operate more efficiently and would require that it focus primarily on its main focus, which is delivering the mail.

H.R. 22 helps enable mailers to partner with the Postal Service to reduce the cost of mailings, providing an efficiency to the Postal Service, and helping businesses to save money that can be invested in jobs and job growth.

The bill is a good idea for postal employees for a lot of different reasons, one of which is because it returns the responsibility for the military service portion of postal retiree benefits back to the government and corrects overpayments by the Postal Service to the Civil Service Retirement System.

□ 1530

In short, the bill provides the changes necessary to keep the Postal Service operating. It is so important to all of us every day. I mean, I know at certain times in my life I felt like if I did not see my friendly mailman or mailwoman at my door, I felt like I did not have a friend in the world. So let us keep the Postal Service operating without the hefty rate increases that would inevitably come with the status quo.

This bill means a great deal to very many people. After so many years of work, I congratulate all of those intimately involved. I urge my colleagues to join me in support of the rule and the underlying bill.

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, we come to the close of offering praise to those who brought us this far. I add my congratulations to

the distinguished leadership of this committee on both sides of the aisle for fashioning a piece of legislation that I believe will pass the House overwhelmingly and that I certainly intend to support, and I ask all of our colleagues to do likewise.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Today, we have had an opportunity to bring forth this postal bill with not only bipartisanship, but really some pats on the back to a lot of people who have been engaged in this issue for a long time, and perhaps none more diligent about this than the gentleman from New York (Mr. MCHUGH), our wonderful colleague. I think the way he has gone about this, Mr. Speaker, has been good, not only for this House but a credit to the men and women who have also been engaged in this.

I remember some 9 years ago as I went with a rural letter carrier down in Jeuit, Texas, Stan Waltrip. I had a chance to go and deliver the mail with Stan and to see firsthand the kinds of, not only the people he came in contact with but the importance of doing this. So this bill is important that we have done this.

There are other people who have contributed to the success, rural letter carriers, certainly the postal carriers, letter carriers, those people who represent the Post Masters, the Financial Services Roundtable and many others. I would also like to thank the White House for their involvement. Three people in particular from the Leg Affairs office, Brian Conklin, Elan Liang, and Chris Frech, have been very diligent in making sure that this House and its Members are updated about the position of the White House.

Mr. Speaker, I would say this is a good piece of legislation. It is one that comes at a great time for this country. It is one that will spur the economy and make sure we are prepared for the future.

I ask my colleagues to please make sure they support this rule and also the underlying legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time, and I move the previous question on the resolution.

The previous question was ordered.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH FAIRNESS ACT OF 2005

Mr. BOEHNER. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to H. Res. 379, I call up the bill (H.R. 525) to amend title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 to improve access and choice for entrepreneurs with small businesses with respect to medical care for their employees, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.